

White Mountain National Forest



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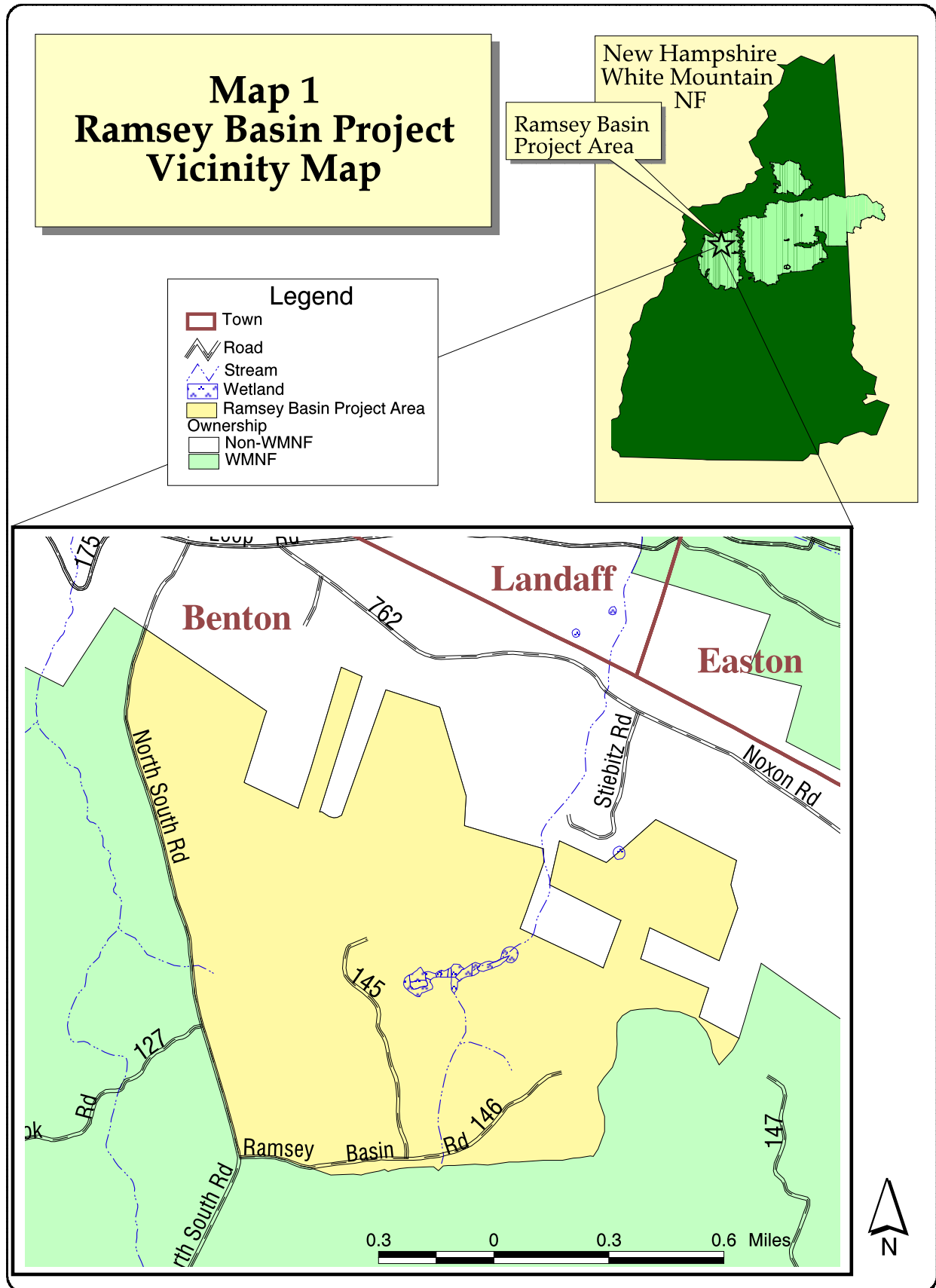


Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Ramsey Basin Project

Located in
Bethlehem, Grafton County, NH
White Mountain National Forest

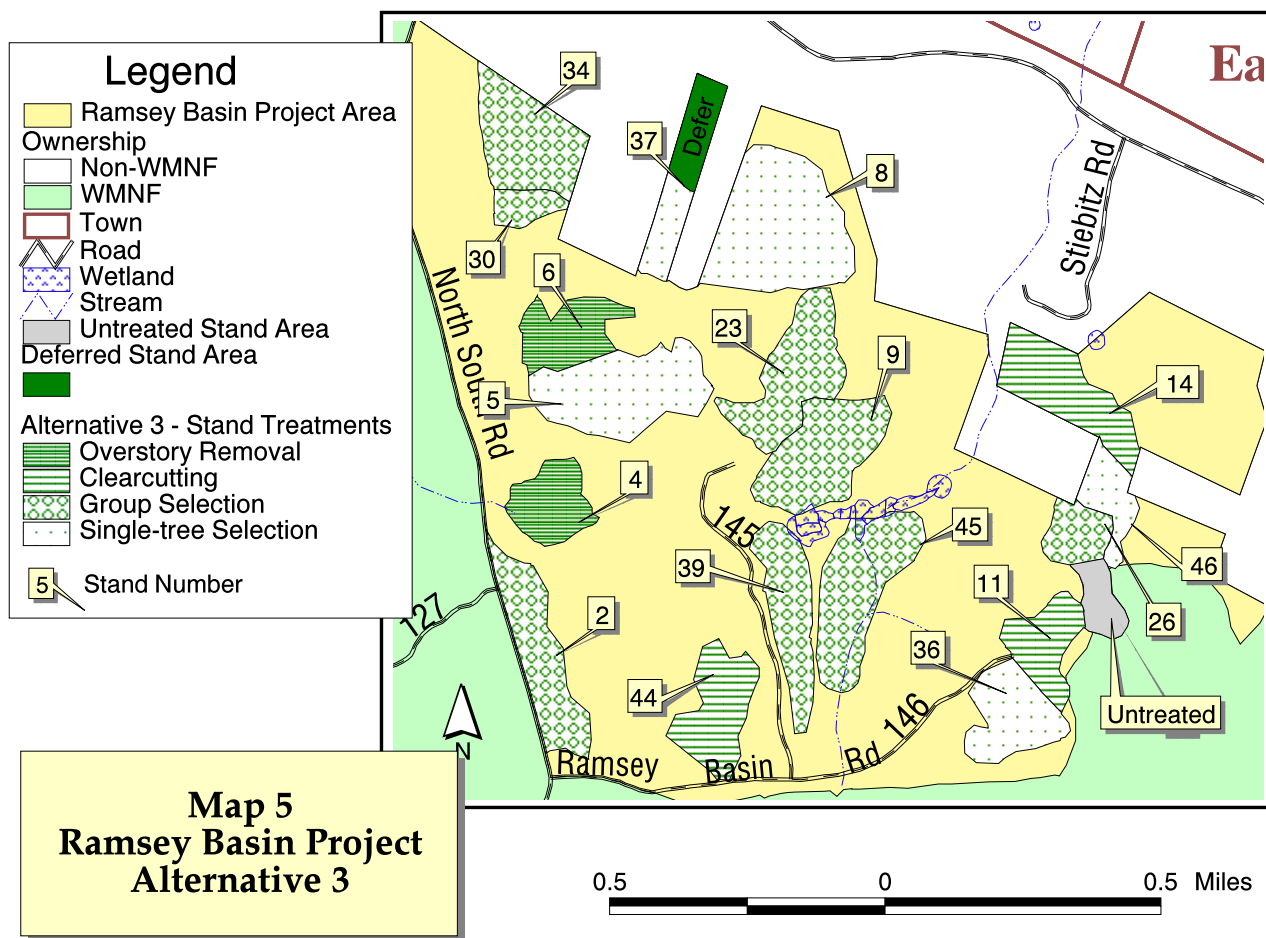


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Ramsey Basin Project Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

I have decided to implement Alternative 3, the Modified Proposed Action, (see *DN: §Decision Point 1*, below, pp. 9-10 and *§Rationale for the Decision*, pp. 14-15; and *EA, §Alternative 2*, pp. 7-8).

The project includes:

- Timber management on 179 treatment acres; and
- Road maintenance on 1.6 miles of road.

Decision to Be Made

This Decision Notice documents my decision of which activities to implement within the Ramsey Basin Project Area to meet the identified purpose and need. Specifically, the decisions documented are:

- **Decision Point 1** (p. 9-10): Which actions, if any, will be approved (which alternative to implement) that will move the Ramsey Basin project area towards the desired condition per Forest Plan direction and best addresses the needs and issues identified for this project?
- **Decision Point 2** (p. 10-13): Does the proposed project have a significant impact that would trigger a need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement?

- **Decision Point 3** (p.13): What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements should the Forest Service apply to these activities to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources?
- **Decision Point 4** (p. 13-14): Will a Forest Plan amendment be required to accommodate this project?

My decision is based on the environmental Assessment documented in the associated Ramsey Basin Environmental Assessment (EA) 2.0, its project record, and the Finding of No Significant Impact (see pages 8-10 of this document). In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40 CFR 1500-1508) and other relevant Federal and state laws and regulations, the Ramsey Basin EA discloses the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects to resources resulting from the No Action and all action alternatives.

Prior to this decision, I have:

- Reviewed the analysis presented in the Ramsey Basin EA for the proposed action and alternatives to that action for the Ramsey Basin Project;
- Considered the comments received during Scoping and discussed the anticipated effects of implementing this decision with the interdisciplinary (ID) team; and

Reviewed technical specialist reports including the biological assessment and evaluation in the project record.

Background

The Ramsey Basin Project Area is located in the town of Bethlehem, New Hampshire on the Ammonoosuc/ Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest. The project area is approximately 3,900 acres of federal land (Management Area 3.1 lands (*EA: Map 3*, p. 6) within Habitat Management Units (HMU) 118 (*EA: Map 2*, p. 4). The Project Area is managed using both even-aged and uneven-aged silvicultural systems.

Purpose & Need for Action

Site-specific needs identified for the Ramsey Basin Project Area

The purpose of this project is to implement Forest Plan direction (WMNF LRMP; USDA Forest Service, 1986, as amended; pages III-5 through III-41) in the Ramsey Basin project area by addressing site-specific needs and opportunities to move the area from the existing condition (EC) towards the desired condition (DC). The Ramsey Basin Project is in Management Area (MA) 3.1 and Habitat Management Units (HMU) 118. The primary purposes of MA 3.1 and HMU 118 are as follows:

- Provide large volumes of high quality hardwood sawtimber on a sustained yield basis and other timber products through intensive management practices; grow smaller-diameter trees for fiber production.
- Increase wildlife habitat diversity for the full range of wildlife species with emphasis on early-successional species.
- Broaden the range of recreation opportunities, mainly those offering semi-primitive motorized experience opportunities. .

Even-aged management will be the most predominant silvicultural system used; uneven-aged management will be used to meet site-specific visual and silvicultural requirements.

Need for Change

The need for change is determined by comparing desired conditions in the Forest Plan with the existing conditions in the project area. The Forest Plan provides desired conditions for even- and uneven-aged management systems for MA 3.1 lands and for HMUs by even- and uneven-aged management systems. The even- and uneven-aged desired conditions apply to the “ideal” management area and are not prorated for each project area.

The following list describes the “needs for change” and opportunities identified for the Ramsey Basin Project Area that would meet the project’s purpose of implementing the Forest Plan.

1. Maintaining and increasing the diversity of wildlife habitats:

Early-Successional Habitat -

A Forest Plan goal for MA 3.1 is to provide an array of habitats for wildlife, especially early-successional habitat (regenerating, 0-9 years) (Forest Plan, p. III-36). This dense growth of woody and herbaceous vegetation is used by a wide variety of wildlife species for at least part of their life cycle.

At the landscape level (HMU 118), the lands where vegetation management is practiced provide 5.1% early-successional habitat. Ideally, there should be 10% of the Project Area in early-successional habitat (Forest Plan, p. III-13, VII-B-4, & VII-B-5;). Over the coming decade, as trees age, early-successional habitat will decline to 0%.

Based on Forest Plan desired composition (10% 0-9 years), there is a need for increased early-successional habitat at the landscape level.

Lack of spruce/fir community type -

The Forest Plan envisions a variety of “ideal” habitat types at the landscape level (HMU 118) (Forest Plan, p. III-36). At the landscape level, there is a lack of the spruce/fir habitat type, especially on lands managed using both the even- and uneven-aged silvicultural systems. There is also an over abundance of the northern hardwood community type (For detail see *EA: Endnote #6*, p. 30).

Based on Forest Plan desired compositions, there is a need for increased spruce/fir community type at the landscape level.

2. Maintaining a sustainable flow of forest products

A Forest Plan goal for MA 3.1 is to provide high-quality sawtimber, fiber, and other forest products on a sustained yield basis (Forest Plan, p. III-36).

Demand for forest products on the Ammonoosuc/Pemigewasset Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest has been high. In FY '03, the District sold 10 million board feet (MMBF) of forest products for a total of 2.1 million dollars (average of \$161,740/MMBF) in five (5) timber sales. There were up to ten (10) bidders on the various sales. The products included high-quality sawtimber and round wood.

To maintain the health, vigor, and productivity of forests and maintain sustainable, efficient, and even flow of forest products, stands need to be treated periodically. In compartment 44, some stands are mature and ready for harvest. They can be regenerated and ready for harvest again in 80-120 years. Other stands have stocking or soil conditions adaptable to uneven-aged management. These can receive a partial harvest, and the space created will be available to young replacement trees. In some stands, this can be done so that softwood trees will become a greater part of the future stocking.

Sawtimber and fiber produced through timber harvesting would provide the forest products envisioned in the Forest Plan.

Based on Forest Plan goals and existing stand conditions in the Ramsey Basin Project Area, there is a need for silvicultural treatments to maintain the health, vigor, and productivity of forests that will provide a sustainable flow of forest products, a diversity of habitats, and a greater percentage of softwood stocking.

Public Involvement

The Forest Service mailed a Scoping letter to approximately 270 interested parties on July 23, 1998.

The proposal was relisted in the White Mountain National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning in December 2001.

Three (3) individuals commented on the proposed action during the formal Scoping process. Comments were used to define unresolved issues, to develop alternatives, and to analyze effects.

Information for 30-Day Comment on Proposed Activities for the Ramsey Basin Project was mailed to interested parties and posted on the White Mountain National Forest web page in May 2004. The 30-Day comment period closed on June 28. No comments were received during the 30-Day Comment Period.

Issues

The Forest Service identified the following unresolved (significant) issues during Scoping (EA, §Issues, pp. 10).

1. Cumulative effects of even-aged management

The amount of clearcutting and overstory removal proposed in this project area will have negative effects on wildlife habitat and visual resources, especially when added to the clearcutting that has occurred on adjacent public and Private land (cumulative impact) (public comment).

2. Long-term Softwood Component in HMU 118

The vegetative Treatments in the Ramsey Basin Project Area will not increase the softwood component that is currently below the Forest Plan desired condition (agency concern).

Decision

Decision Point 1:

Which actions, if any, will be approved (which alternative to implement) that will move the Ramsey Basin Project Area towards the desired condition per Forest Plan direction and the needs identified for this project?

I have chosen to implement Alternative 3, the Modified Proposed Action, displayed on Map 5 (DN, p. 4) 2. Table 1, below (EA, p. 7), lists the activities proposed in Alternative 3.

Table 1: Activities in Modified Proposed Action

Activity	Amount	
	Treatment Ac	Stand Ac
Timber Harvesting:		
Even-Aged Management -		
Clearcutting (northern hardwood, mixed hardwood softwood)	40 Ac	44 Ac
Overstory Removal (spruce/fir)	23 Ac	
Uneven-Aged Management -		
Single-Tree Selection (approximately 25% of the stand basal area)	88 Ac	94 Ac
Group Selection (groups range in size from 1/10 to 2 Ac in size; ½ Ac average; represent approximately 20% of stand Ac)	28 Ac	137 Ac
Total	179 Ac	298 Ac
Transportation:		
Road Maintenance (North South Road, Forest Roads 145, 146)	1.6 Mi	
Approximate Volume:	1.1 MMBF	

During project implementation, actual amounts of activities accomplished on the ground (measured in acres or miles) may vary slightly to match actual field conditions. Any changes would be evaluated to ensure that any effects are within the parameters of the effects analyzed in the Ramsey Basin EA and would be documented in Ramsey Basin project file.

The transportation system is in place and no road construction or reconstruction is included in this alternative.

Alternative 3 meets the purpose and need identified for this project and accomplishes Forest Plan direction by following the Management Area direction and Standards and Guidelines for MA 3.1 (Forest Plan, pp. III-36 to III-41). Alternative 3 provides an appropriate mix of silvicultural treatments to accomplish wildlife habitat improvement objectives and sustainable timber growth and harvesting program. Clearcutting is the optimum method of regenerating mature stands (*Forest Plan FEIS*, pp. IV-30 through IV-40 [§(3), ¶¶1 & 2, pp. 37-38]; *Forest Plan, Appendix M – Vegetation Management Practices – Rationale For Choices*). Group and single-tree selection are appropriate methods of harvesting and replacing mature trees. The mix of silvicultural management practices provided by Alternative 3 best utilizes the existing potential of sites and trees to accomplish Forest Plan Objectives utilizing Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for timber management in MA 3.1 (*Forest Plan*, pp. III-37-39).

1. Maintaining and increasing the diversity of wildlife habitats:

Early-Successional Habitat -

Alternative 3 creates 43 acres of early-successional habitat.

Lack of spruce/fir community type -

Assuming that group selections proposed in this project were to be repeated through three additional entries, at the landscape level (HMU 118) the greatest long-term (60 years) increase in softwood component would be achieved by Alternative 3 or 4 at 20%. In addition if similar treatments were applied in other parts of the HMU, the softwood habitat type could be increased to match Forest plan goals. Increasing softwood habitat type would provide a more diverse wildlife habitat mix and moves the area towards the Forest Plan desired condition.

2. Maintaining a sustainable flow of forest products

Alternative 3 will provide approximately 1.1 MMBF of timber products.

Decision Point 2: FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT -

Does the proposed project have a significant impact that would trigger a need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement?

I have reviewed the effects of Alternative 3, taking into account both the context and intensity described in 40 CFR 1508. After thorough consideration of the analysis presented in the Ramsey Basin EA, Forest Plan, and comments received, I have determined that these actions are not a major federal action, individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. In a local context, the site-specific actions of the selected alternative (Alternative 3) both short and long term, are not significant. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination is based on the following intensity factors.

Consideration of Beneficial and Adverse Effects

Both beneficial and adverse effects of implementing Alternative 2 have been considered (*EA, §Comparison of Alternatives*, pp. 19-24 and *Chapter 3 - Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects*, pp. 25-83).

Effects on Public Health and Safety

Public health and safety are not adversely affected by the Modified Proposed Action (Alternative 3) (*EA: §Purpose of the Proposal*, pp. 8-9; *Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures*, pp. 15-17; and effectiveness of mitigation measures analyzed throughout the Ramsey Basin EA, *Chapter 3 - Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects*, pp. 25-83). Mitigation measures in place to minimize possible conflicts between timber harvesting activities and the recreational public in the project area (*EA: – Table E1: Mitigation Measures*, pp. 15-17.)

Unique Physical or Biological Characteristics

Although features such as cultural resources and wetlands are located in the Project Area, none of the unique characteristics of the geographical area will be significantly affected Alternative 3 (*EA: Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects*, pp. 25-83). No parklands, prime farmland, or wild and scenic rivers are found in the project area.

Level of Controversy

Controversy is described as a dispute amongst the scientific community. Based on that definition, there is no substantial dispute amongst the scientific community as to the size, nature, or effect of the federal action on the various biological and physical environments. Based on the involvement of Forest resource specialists and members of the public (Scoping), the effects of the proposed actions on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial). All of the effects of the Alternative 3 (*EA: Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects*, pp. 25-83) are within the scope of those considered and analyzed in the Forest Plan FEIS, Chapter IV.

The EA, *§Effects Determinations for TEPS and Other Species of Concern*, p. 64-65, discloses that the USFWS concurred with the effects determinations in the Ramsey Basin BE/BA.

NHNHI stated that they have no documented occurrence of rare or exemplary natural communities near the project area and no documented occurrences of sensitive species within the project area (*Project File*).

Uncertain, Unique, or Unknown Effects on the Quality of Human the Environment

There are no known effects to the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. All of the effects of the Alternative 3 (*EA: Chapter 3 - Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative*

Effects, pp. 25-83) are within the scope of those considered and analyzed in the Forest Plan FEIS, Chapter IV. This timber-harvesting proposal is similar to many other timber management projects that have been conducted on the White Mountain National Forest for which the effects are known through experience, records of timber sale inspections, and stand examination.

Possible Precedent for Future Actions

These actions do not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed action incorporates those practices envisioned in the Forest Plan under Management Area 3.1 direction and within the Standards and Guidelines of the Forest Plan.

Cumulative Relationship of Actions

These actions do not individually, nor taken cumulatively with other activities within the areas affected, reach a level of significance (*EA: Chapter 3 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects*, pp. 25-83). The EA describes the cumulative effects on soils, water quality and quantity, air quality, vegetation, terrestrial wildlife, aquatic resources, transportation, cultural resources, visual, recreation, economics, community well being, and environmental justice. I am satisfied after review of the EA that none of the cumulative effects of the proposed action are significant. Where appropriate, mitigation measures are proposed that are known to keep activities below the threshold level of significance (*EA: Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures*, pp. 15-17).

Effects on Significant Scientific, Cultural, or Historical Resources

Heritage resource surveys were completed (*CRRR# 023-029, 031, and 065-068; EA, §3.3.2 Cultural Resources*, pp. 74-76). There are no known cultural resource sites within or near harvesting units in the Ramsey Basin Project, and no anticipated loss of significant scientific, historic, or cultural resources is expected.

If, in the course of any project activities, previously unknown sites or artifacts were to be located, activities would stop immediately in that location. The district heritage paraprofessional or Forest archaeologist would be called in to evaluate the finds and make recommendations on how to proceed (*Forest Plan*, p. III-10).

Threat to Endangered Species or Their Habitat per the Endangered Species Act

The Biological Evaluation/Assessment (BE/BA) determined that federally-listed TEPS or their habitat would not be adversely affected by the actions of this project (see project file). The White Mountain National Forest completed a Forest-wide Biological Assessment (BA) of the potential effects to Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Sensitive species (TEPS) from continued implementation of the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) subsequently rendered a Biological Opinion (BO) with the Incidental Take Statement (USDI, 2000), which concurred with the White Mountain National Forest BA, that continued implementation of the Forest Plan

would cause either a beneficial effect, no effect, and/or not likely to adversely affect the majority of TEPS species for the White Mountain National Forest, and is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Canada lynx and Indiana bat. See §*Decision Point 4* and §*Endangered Species Act (ESA)*, below.

Threat or Violation of Laws or Requirements that Protect the Environment

Applicable laws were incorporated into the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines (*Forest Plan*, pages III-5 through III-41), and Alternative 2 complies with the Forest Plan, as amended. In addition, some project mitigation measures have incorporated more recent “Best Management Practices” utilized by state agencies (*EA: Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures*, pp. 15-17). The actions do not threaten a violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment. See §*Findings Required By Other Laws and Regulations*, below.

Decision Point 3:

What mitigation measures and monitoring requirements should the Forest Service apply to these activities to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines for all resources?

The management requirements necessary to meet the intent of current direction, regulation and law include:

- Standards and Guidelines in the Land and Resource Management Plan for the White Mountain National Forest, as amended (Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species, April 4, 2001);
- Canada Lynx Conservation Agreement and Strategy (CLCAS); and
- Terms and Conditions of the Biological Opinion on the Forest-Wide Programmatic BA.

Mitigation measures designed to prevent or reduce possible effects resulting from the implementation of the selected alternative are documented in the *EA, Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures*, pp. 15-17. Implementation and Effectiveness Monitoring would be implemented as part of my decision.

Decision Point 4:

Will a Forest Plan amendment be required to accommodate this project?

The activities proposed in the Ramsey Basin Project and their potential effects are within those anticipated and evaluated in Chapter IV of the Forest Plan FEIS and are consistent with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines (see §*Consistency With the Forest Plan*, p. 9). Therefore, no Forest Plan amendment will be required to implement this project.

Rationale for the Decision

I have chosen Alternative 3 – Modified Proposed Action for the following reasons:

1. Alternative 3 is consistent with the agency mission. Through Congressional mandate, National Forest Lands are managed to provide multiple benefits to

all Americans in a sustainable way for present and future generations. The original management emphasis was identified as watershed protection (Creative Act, 1891) and a continuous supply of wood products (Organic Act, 1897). Over the years, management for wildlife and fish, outdoor recreation, wilderness, heritage resources, grazing, wild and scenic rivers, and roads were added to the Forest Service mission. General direction, for how the White Mountain National Forest is to be managed in a sustainable way for multiple benefits is found within the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

2. This alternative is responsive to the protection and maintenance of environmental quality, including site productivity, water quality, anadromous fish habitat, TES wildlife and plant species, native plant communities, and management indicator species (MIS). This decision moves the project area toward the desired condition of forest stands that provide a diversity of habitats for a wide range of wildlife species and a sustainable flow of commercial timber; best meets the stated purpose and need; addresses the issues; and provides for environmental protection through project design features, management requirements, and mitigation measures.
3. This alternative provides several opportunities to increase the softwood component in the long term.

Under Alternative 3, clearcutting is replaced by group selection in 7 stands (Alternative 2 – Proposed Action). These areas have an understory of softwood regeneration that would be encouraged through group selection. By the end of this decade 27 acres of northern hardwoods would be converted to a spruce/fir forest type. If the treatments are repeated in 20-year entries, spruce/fir will increase to 20% of HMU 118 within 60 years. In addition if similar treatments were applied in other parts of the HMU, the softwood habitat type could be increased to approach Forest plan goals. Increasing softwood habitat type would provide a more diverse and better balanced wildlife habitat mix than would Alternatives 1, 2 or 4.

Alternative 2 meets the intent of the primary land management prescription emphasis for Management Area 3.1:

- Provide large volumes of high quality hardwood sawtimber on a sustained yield basis and other timber products through intensive management practices including smaller-diameter trees for fiber production.
- Increase wildlife habitat diversity for the full range of wildlife species with emphasis on early successional species.
- Broaden the range of recreation opportunities, mainly those offering semi-primitive motorized experience opportunities.
- Even-aged management will be the most predominant silvicultural system used; uneven-aged management will be used to meet site-specific visual and

silvicultural requirements and generally range from 3-30 acres. Uneven-aged management will be considered on a forest setting. This conforms to 36CFR219.27(g) that states that diversity must be “at least as great as that which would be expected in a natural forest.” In addition, because the majority of the wildlife species in the planning area have a primary or secondary requirement for regenerating or young vegetation, management activities must be directed toward supplying these habitats throughout the 337,000 acres of HMU 118 in a manner that strives for a controlled distribution and even supply across space and time.

My selection of Alternative 3 furthers the efforts of the White Mountain National Forest to create early-successional habitat within the Ramsey Basin Project Area, moves the project area towards Forest Plan desired conditions for HMU 118, maintains an adequate road system to meet the various objectives of MA 3.1, and provides a sustained flow of timber to help meet public demand for wood products.

I believe that Alternative 3 balances the outputs and outcomes envisioned by the Forest Plan for this management area by increasing wildlife habitat diversity (early-successional habitat - 43 acres and softwood habitat type - up to 20 % over the long term) and providing quality hardwood sawtimber and other timber products through timber management (1.1 MMBF).

See also *§Other Alternatives Considered and Why They Were Not Selected*, below, p.15-17.

Consistency with the Forest Plan

Management activities are to be consistent with the Forest Plan. The decision to implement Alternative 3 of the Ramsey Basin Environmental Assessment is consistent with the White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended, Standards, Guidelines (see *EA*, *§Alternatives*, p.11-14 and *Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures*, pp. 15-17; and under individual resource analyses in *Chapter 3*).

Other Alternatives Considered and Why They were Not Selected

In developing the reasonable range of alternatives, the ID team considered alternatives that reasonably responded to the purpose and need, and addressed the significant issues resulting from Scoping. As required by Federal regulation [40 CFR 1502.14(d)], the ID team also analyzed the No Action alternative (Alternative 1).

The initial project proposal was developed July 1998 to meet the objective of increasing early-successional habitat and softwood habitat type for a diversity of wildlife species and the need to supply commercial timber to meet the public’s

demand for wood products (Forest Plan, pp. III-36).

Chapter 2 of the EA (pp. 12-24) discusses the alternatives analyzed in depth. (EA: §*Alternatives considered in detail* and §*Comparison of Alternatives*).

Alternative 1 - No Action

If Alternative 1 were to be selected, no mature stands would be cut and regenerated, no mature trees would be cut and replaced by young trees, the softwood habitat type would not increase over time, and no forest products would be produced. New, young growth would be limited to small patches where natural mortality would occur (caused by wind, or insect and disease). Softwood development would be dependent on natural processes.

I have not selected this alternative because it does not meet the stated purpose and need for the Ramsey Basin Project of increasing wildlife habitat diversity for a full range of species with an emphasis on early-successional habitat and lack of spruce/fir component and does not supply wood to meet public demand.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action and Alternative 4 - Uneven-Aged Management

Alternative 2 is the Proposed Action. The treatments proposed in this alternative would provide the maximum amount of early-successional habitat (92 acres vs. 43 in Alternative 3 and 0 acres in Alternative 4) and would maintain the current levels of soft wood composition but would not increase them.

Alternative 4 (as with Alternative 3), replaces clearcutting by group selection in 7 stands. These areas have an understory of softwood regeneration that would be encouraged through group selection. By the end of this decade 27 acres of northern hardwoods would be converted to a spruce/fir forest type. If the treatments are repeated in 20-year entries, spruce/fir will increase from 14 to 18% of HMU 118 within 60 years. The remaining clearcuts and overstory removals would be replaced by group selection. The stands prescribed for overstory removal would remain a softwood type, but with a multi-age composition. The stands that would be clearcut in Alternative 3 do not have a softwood understory and would not result in and increase in softwood type.

Alternative 2 would maximize early-successional habitat (92 acres) and forest products (1.4 MMBF) and maintain current softwood habitat type in the Project Area. Alternative 4 would provide no early-successional habitat in the Project Area, would provide 0.6 MMBF of forest products, and would increase softwood habitat over the long term to 20%.

There are two components identified in Need #1 for the Ramsey Basin Project Area (pp. 4-5 above): early-successional habitat and lack of softwood habitat type. Alternative 2 only moves the Project Area towards the desired condition for early-successional habitat, and Alternative 3 only moves the Project Area

towards the desired condition for softwood habitat type. Because Alternative 3 moves the Project Area towards both these desired conditions, I have not chosen Alternative 2 or 4.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

National Historical Preservation Act

See *§Effects on Significant Scientific, Cultural, or Historical Resources*, pp. 7-8, above

Executive Order 11990 (wetlands) and 11988 (floodplains)

This project does not impact any floodplains or wetlands, because undisturbed buffers have been designated to separate treatment units from floodplains or wetland areas. Alternative 3 would be in compliance with both of these orders.

Executive Order 12898, "Environmental Justice"

The selected alternative (3) will not have a disproportionate effect on low income or minority populations as defined by this executive order

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

See *§Threat to Endangered Species or Their Habitat per The Endangered Species Act*, p. 8, above. The White Mountain National Forest completed a forest-wide BA of the potential effects to Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Sensitive species (TEPS) from continued implementation of the 1986 Forest Plan as amended (USDA 1999). The USFWS subsequently rendered a Biological Opinion with the Incidental Take Statement (USDI 2000), which concurred with the White Mountain National Forest BA that continued implementation of the Forest Plan would cause either a beneficial effect, no effect, and/or not likely to adversely affect the majority of TEPS species for the White Mountain National Forest, and is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Canada lynx and Indiana bat.

The White Mountain National Forest also completed a site-specific BE/BA for the Ramsey Basin Project. The Ramsey Basin BE/BA determined that all action alternatives would cause **no effect** to the federally-listed Canada lynx, and they are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines outlined in the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy for protecting suitable lynx habitat. The BE/BA determined the action alternatives **may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect** Federally-listed endangered Indiana bat, and they are consistent with the Terms and Conditions outlined in the BO (USDI 2000). The action alternatives would cause **no impact** to the Federally-listed R9 Sensitive peregrine falcon, and **may impact individuals, but would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species** of Federally-listed R9 Sensitive eastern small-footed myotis, northern bog lemming, wood turtle and several plant species. This Ramsey Basin BE/BA received concurrence from the USFWS (*Project File*).

Clean Water Act

The beneficial uses of water in the streams draining the project area would be maintained during and following project implementation through proper project design, mitigation, and Best Management Practices (BMPs) (*EA: Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures, pp. 15-17*).

Clean Air Act

Air quality will not be affected (*EA, §Air Quality, pp.33-34*).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Implementation of Alternative 3 would be consistent with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

This EA and Decision Notice have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires specific determinations in the Record of Decision, including consistency with the existing Forest Plan. This project complies with the Forest Plan, NFMA, and 36 CFR 219.

This project ensures that timber will only be harvested where:

- Soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged and protection is provided for streams, or other bodies of water from detrimental changes (Project incorporates Forest Plan Standards, Best Management Practices, and Mitigation Measures - *EA: §Soils, pp. 28-30 and §Vegetation, pp. 34-43; Chapter 3, Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects, pp. 25-83; Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures, pp. 15-17*).
- Lands can be adequately restocked (*EA, §Comparison of Alternatives, pp. 21-24 and §Vegetation, pp. 34-43*). The Ramsey Basin Project provides the desired effects including those to residual trees and adjacent stands (*EA: Chapter 3 - Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Cumulative Effects, pp. 25-83; Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures, pp. 15-, pp. 48-56*).
- The harvesting system selected is practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements. It was not selected based on the greatest dollar return or the greatest output of timber (*EA, §Comparison of Alternatives, pp. 14-23; §Transportation, pp. 26-28, §Community, Environmental Justice, & Economics, pp. 81-83; Endnotes – Table E1: Mitigation Measures, pp. 15-, pp. 48-56*); and
- The project is best suited to the multiple-use goals established for the Project Area (*§Rationale for the Decision, pp 10-12, above*).

Optimality of Harvest Methods

Choosing the optimum harvest method for regenerating a particular stand is influenced by the silvicultural requirements of the species on the sites, existing stand conditions, issues raised during the analysis, prior experiences in the area, and direction from the Forest Plan. The first step is to assign a silvicultural prescription to each stand after a field examination. This prescription is based primarily on the biological requirements of the stand and the objectives of the Management Area. This prescription is then subject to interdisciplinary analysis, with special consideration given to the issues raised during scoping and the alternatives developed. In some cases, prescriptions may be modified in order to mitigate other resource concerns such as visual quality, water quality, or composition guidelines. Regardless of the alternative, the proposed harvest method is always sufficient to ensure adequate regeneration stocking of the stand.

Regulations (36 CFR 219.15) require that vegetation management practices be chosen that are appropriate to meet the objectives and requirements of the Forest Plan. The use of clearcutting is the optimum method for promoting the regeneration of certain species in the project area. These activities are consistent with the Forest Plan, in particular for regeneration of the paper birch, northern hardwood, red maple, and balsam fir/paper birch/aspen forest types. Likewise the use of even-aged management is consistent with the direction for the Management Areas in the project area. See Appendix M of the Forest Plan (pp VIII-M-1-9) for further discussion. Potential environmental, biological, esthetic, engineering, and economic impacts have been assessed.

Implementation and Appeal Rights

No comments were received on the Ramsey Basin Project during the 30-Day Comment Period. Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(e)(1), “(e) Projects or activities for which notice of the proposed action and opportunity to comment is published (§215.5) and (1) No substantive comments expressing concerns . . . are received during the comment period for a proposed action analyzed and documented in an EA (215.6),” this decision is not subject to appeal.

Implementation Date

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.9(c)(1), “When a project or activity is not subject to appeal (215.12), implementation can occur as follows: (1) Immediately after publication (§215.7(b)) of a decision documented in a Decision Notice,” the Ramsey Basin Project can be implemented following the publication of this decision in the Union Leader newspaper.

Responsible Official

John Serfass,
Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset District Ranger,
White Mountain National Forest

For More Information

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District Ranger
Ammonoosuc-Pemigewasset District

Date

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